

Video Clip: PAX Perspective Airline Review: Air Canada

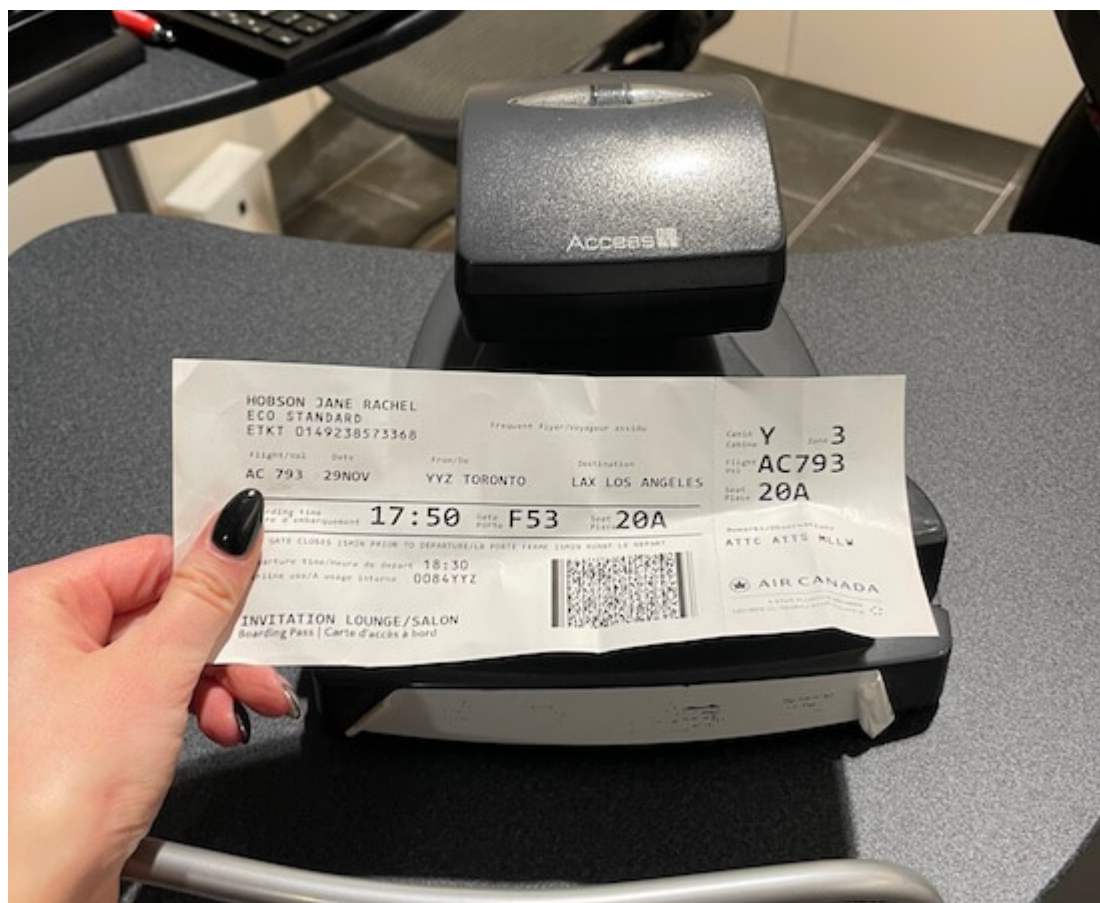
In this PAX Perspective Airline Review, *PAX International* Editor Jane Hobson evaluates an [Air Canada](#) roundtrip flight from Toronto Pearson ([YYZ](#)) to Los Angeles ([LAX](#)) in Economy Class.



PAX Editor Jane Hobson inflight. Photo: Jane Hobson

The outbound flight: I flew Air Canada flight AC793 from Toronto Pearson to Los Angeles on Monday November 29 at 6:30 p.m. in the Economy Class cabin on an A321.

Check in: Via the Air Canada iOS mobile app, I was able to fully complete the check-in process before even arriving at the airport. I uploaded all required travel documents, including my negative COVID-19 test results and proof of vaccination, which is required when traveling internationally from Canada. The documents were verified on the app, so when I arrived at the airport the evening of my flight, the crew at the check-in counter was able to issue my printed ticket quickly.



Guests must scan boarding passes and show proof of vaccination when entering the lounge. Photo: Jane Hobson

The lounge: As part of the review, Air Canada granted me the opportunity to visit the [Maple Leaf Lounge](#) at Toronto Pearson which recently reopened for the first time during the pandemic. Located on Level 4 of Terminal 1, I showed my boarding pass and proof of vaccination to enter, as per provincial public health regulations. There were also several notices to maintain six feet of separation, and honestly the lounge was not too busy that Monday night for me to feel worried about my personal space.



Upon entering the lounge, I immediately felt a sense of calm. The lighting was soft and there was lots of seating. Photo: Jane Hobson

Even though some parts of the lounge are under renovation, it was a lovely quiet retreat from the busyness of the airport. The lights seemed softer, the temperature warmer and an overall coziness flooded the space - a perfect spot to relax pre-flight.

Nathaniel Vincent, Lounge Manager at YYZ, was kind enough to give me a tour of the Maple Leaf Lounge. It features complimentary Wi-Fi, ample seating, a quiet area, a workspace with computers, a kids' room with a television, and theater room with a television and large armchairs. The bar, hot food,

menu, cold food, coffee, and tea are all offered complimentary. Plus, guests have access to superbly clean washrooms, and showers – but the showers are still being renovated.



Top left: Comfortable seating areas available. Top right: Workspace with computers and privacy. Bottom left: A quiet area. Bottom right: A kids' room, with television and space for play. Photo: Jane Hobson

To freshen up in the showers, guests must leave their boarding pass with the lounge agent in exchange for the facility key. When the key is returned, you get your boarding pass back, explains Vincent.



Cold small meals and water bottles are available for self-serve. Photo: Jane Hobson

The bar had wine, beer, and standard cocktails available, served by the bartender. Guests can help themselves to water, coffee, tea, and snacks, as well as cold food items such as pasta salads and sandwiches. Hot meals can be ordered to your table via the “@ la table service.” The menu is accessible by scanning the QR code on the table. I had chips, a soda, some water, and pasta salad and was feeling very satisfied when it came time to board the flight.



Left: Lounge bar with drink service by bartenders. Right: Self-serve snack area with coffee, water, tea,

chips and other small snacks, all complimentary. Photo: Jane Hobson



My pre-flight snack. Photo: Jane Hobson

Boarding: Back up in Terminal 1, things were much brighter, louder, and busier as the queue to board formed. There wasn't much actual social distancing happening despite the reminders. Entering the aircraft, everyone was offered a sanitizing wipe – as is standard nowadays. The crew was masked up, reminding passengers that they must do the same the whole flight, and helping as all the passengers got settled.

There was a delay in take off because the aircraft needed to be de-iced. The captain and crew kept all of us informed. I guess it is partly to be expected when flying on a snowy Canadian night.



De-icing the wing of the A321-200 before takeoff caused a bit of a delay, but is to be expected when travel from Toronto in the winter. Photo: Jane Hobson

Seating and interior configuration: This flight is operated by an A321-200, but Andrew Yiu, Air Canada, Vice President, Product, says the airline plans to refurbish the fleet soon. The cabin I flew on will be phased out shortly, he says.

The A321 has 174 Economy Class seats in a 3 x 3 configuration. The seats in Economy Class are from Collins Spectrum (seating company & model) and have a 31-inch seat pitch, which is typical in this Class and configuration. My seat was near the wing, 20A. The seat itself was comfortable, but with the tray table down for my snacks and packed into the window seat (which was my request), I did not feel

like I had enough living space to get too comfortable on the long-haul flight. All this to say, in Economy Class, I prefer an aisle seat. It is easier to squeeze in a wee leg stretch, and access the lavatory with less disruption to my aisle-mates.



The seatback screen on the outbound flight. Photo: Jane Hobson

The first four rows of the A321 are Business Class, with 16 seats in a 2 x 2 configuration. These seats offer a bit more space with 37-inch seat pitch.

Inflight entertainment & connectivity: I was pleased to find that all Economy seats had a seatback screen. The Thales IFE system had movies, TV shows, and an interactive map from [Rockwell-Collins Airshow](#). I particularly enjoyed being able to see where we were flying over. I noticed the technology lagged a bit between tapping the screen for a command and my selection loading. There also was no Bluetooth connectivity for my wireless headphones. Wired earphones were available for \$3.50 CAD (US\$2.80), but I opted to use my own Beats Solo Pro paired with my iPhone for entertainment.

I was given complimentary access to Wi-Fi - a first for me! It connected easily once we were inflight, and I was able to use all my social and messaging apps as normal. It helped pass the flight.

Power outlets & charging: I was also really pleased to find 110-volt connection charging port on the seatback for laptops as well as USB. Being able to charge my phone was a major relief.



Seatback USB port and power outlet. Photo: Jane Hobson

Amenities & comfort products: Earlier in the flight, all passengers were given a Clean Care+ package, which included a white face mask from Guard, two sanitizing gel packs, two benzalkonium chloride wipes, and message from Dr. Jim Chung, Air Canada's Chief Medical Officer. Maybe some would not qualify it as an amenity or comfort product, but I was happy to know I had a fresh face mask available and it also gave me an overall feeling of being well looked after.



The inflight food was tasty and filling, although the salad was a bit dry. Photo: Jane Hobson

Food and beverage: Drinks and food service started once the seatbelts signs were turned off after take-off. Air Canada kindly gifted me a chicken sandwich, couscous salad and pastry, which I paired with a Ginger Ale. The sandwich was good and surprisingly filling, but I found the salad to be a bit dry. I saved the pastry for while I was watching a movie on my phone and enjoyed the sweet treat. I brought along my own reusable water bottle, which I refilled with complimentary water bottles inflight. Food and drink were offered again before landing but to my surprise, I was full!

The PAX Perspective: It was an enjoyable flight. I have flown during the pandemic on some LCC's for personal vacation, but flying Air Canada was a welcome change - not to mention touching down in warm Los Angeles.



View from the window of the return flight. Photo: Jane Hobson

The return flight: I flew Air Canada flight AC792 from Los Angeles to Toronto Pearson on Friday December 3 at 12:15 p.m. in the Economy Class cabin on a 787-8.



Left: Maple Leaf Lounge entrance at LAX. Right: The bar and food counter with full staff service and seat delivery. Photo: Jane Hobson

Check in: Check-in at LAX was a bit different for a couple reasons. The check-in lines on this Friday morning were long. There was not a lot of social distancing happening. My proof of negative COVID-19 test results (required to re-enter Canada) was only in printed paper format, so I assumed it would need to be verified by a member of Air Canada for me to obtain my boarding pass. But to my surprise, I used a minimal-touch kiosk to check-in and it simply asked me to declare that I was vaccinated. The interface was not that easy to use, but I managed to scan my passport, make my health declaration and print my boarding pass in significantly less time than waiting in the line.

The lounge: After security – which was run both hectically and somehow efficiently at the same time – I popped into the Maple Leaf Lounge, located in Terminal 6. I met Ronny Hoque, Lounge Manager at LAX, who gave me a tour. The lounge was smaller and much busier than at YYZ, but much of the offerings were the same, as expected.



Snacks and beverages are complimentary in the Maple Leaf Lounge. Photo: Jane Hobson

I scanned my boarding pass and displayed my proof of vaccination to enter. Food, snacks and drinks were available but not by self-serve. The staff was lovely and doting, and brought my order directly to where I was seated. I enjoyed a glass of white wine, a Greek salad, cucumber salad, a coffee, some water, and muffins while waiting to board.



Complimentary light meals and wine at the Maple Leaf Lounge LAX. Photo: Jane Hobson

Boarding: The boarding process was the same as the outbound flight. Everyone was given a sanitizing wipe and a [Clean Care + package](#), and we were all reminded to keep our masks on.

Seating and interior configuration: This flight is operated by a 787-8. It has 214 Economy Class seats in a 3 x 3 x 3 configuration. The seats in Economy Class are the [Pinnacle model from Collins Aerospace](#) and have a 31-inch seat pitch.



The Clean Care + kit supplied by Air Canada. Photo: Jane Hobson

My seat was near the wing, 34K. It was comfortable, and I felt like I had more space – likely because the cabin ceiling was higher in this aircraft due to the whole interior being bigger.

The first five rows of the 787 are Business Class, with 20 seats in a 1 x 2 x 1 configuration. These lie-flat seats from [Collins](#) offer lots of living space for a very luxurious experience.



The Premium Economy set up. Photo: Jane Hobson

There are 21 Premium Economy seats in a 2 x 3 x 2 configuration, offering 38-inch seat pitch for extra living space.

A thoughtful feature about this seat was the ability to dim the light coming through the window. Traveling through time zones, I left LA at noon but would be arriving in Toronto in the dark. A handy button below the window increases the tint which helped me adjust better to the time change.



The window dimming button helped me adjust to the time change when flying back to Toronto. Photo: ¹₄

Jane Hobson

Inflight entertainment & connectivity: I had access to complimentary Wi-Fi again which was excellent for scrolling some social and messaging apps. The [Panasonic ex3 IFE system](#) did not disappoint. It is the latest generation of IFE for the airline and it shows. The screens looked newer, the touch response was much faster, and there was the option to watch movies, TV, listen to music, play games, shop, and look at the interactive map. An upgrade from the outbound A321 flight which seems dated in comparison.



The seatback screens and configuration of Economy Class on the Toronto-bound 787. Photo: Jane Hobson

I was kindly gifted a pair of premium ergonomic noise-reducing silicon headphones made by [Linstol](#). 15

They come in a hard-shell travel case and while the sound quality was high and the convenience of plugging them into the seatback was fun, I still opted to use my own personal devices for entertainment. It just made more sense to me since I was simultaneously texting and looking at social media while listening to music.



Air Canada branded headphones. Photo: Jane Hobson

Power outlets & charging: The seatback had USB charging, which I used gratefully.

Interiors: This is the largest aircraft I have ever flown on. I was pleased that it felt spacious and even though I was in seat 34, I was only a few seats away from the middle-of-the-cabin lavatory.

Food and beverage: On this flight, I was gifted a main and snack. The mac & cheese really hit the spot – it was the perfect temperature and came served with a bun. The texture of the pasta was deliciously al dente and had a lovely crust-like bread crumb topping. The dark chocolate cherry fruit and nut bar from [MadeGood](#) was surprisingly filling and a sweet way to end my meal. Again, I refilled my personal canteen with the complimentary water bottles. Food and drink were offered before landing but I was, you guessed it, full.



Lunch and a movie. Photo: Jane Hobson

The PAX Perspective: The hospitality of Air Canada agents, crew and lounge staff was just one of the many aspects that made this roundtrip experience one to remember. It was my happy reminder that flying is enjoyable, especially when accompanied by tasty snacks and the convenience of entertainment at your fingertips in Economy Class. A delightful experience to fly again, and I'm looking forward to doing a lot more in the future.